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SUBJECT: ALPBACH POLITICAL FORUM: EU UNABLE TO PROJECT

GLOBAL POWER

REF: Vienna 3025

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: The EU, a self-conscious "soft power," is unable or unwilling to use the potential for political clout that stems from its economic might. At the same time, EU membership holds considerable attraction for countries in the Western Balkans and beyond, and is an important incentive for reform of those economies and political systems. These were among the principal themes that emerged from the 2005 Alpbach Forum Political Seminar, which took place August 28-31 in the idyllic Tyrolean town of Alpbach. Panelists from several Balkan states, EU RelEx Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, Russian and U.S. speakers focused on the EU's strengths and weaknesses, the EU's relationship with Russia, the Balkans, the Middle East, and the EU's security policy potential. Officials from Kosovo and Montenegro made the case for the independence of their regions. Serb ForMin Vuk Draskovic gave a compelling speech to promote his vision of "more than autonomy, less than independence" for Kosovo. A Czech Member of the European Parliament argued that the challenges facing the West were so urgent that no time must be lost in petty trans-Atlantic bickering. Anti-American rhetoric was conspicuous by its absence from the discussion. (Note: Rftel reports the Alpbach Economic Forum. End note.) End summary.

EU paralysis and future EU borders

[1](#)2. The negative mood in the EU following the "no" votes in constitutional referenda in France and the Netherlands was the theme of several keynote addresses. EU External Relations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner conceded there was an air of uncertainty about future institutional arrangements. However, she hastened to underline that Brussels was continuing its normal routine, pointing to her recent meetings with Iraqi and Afghani leaders. Ferrero-Waldner further spoke of the need to ponder the ultimate borders of the EU, but confirmed that accession negotiations with Turkey would begin as scheduled on October 3. She urged new funding resources for the EU and advocated an EU seat in the UN Security Council at some point in the future.

13. Alpbach Forum organizer Erhard Busek was able to leverage his long engagement in the Balkans as EU Stability Pact Coordinator to draw a number of high-ranking officials from the region to the event. In a spellbinding speech, Serbia and Montenegro ForMin Vuc Draskovic argued for Serbia's reintegration into the Western community of nations. He dealt well with probing questions from an overwhelmingly hostile, late-night student audience who accused him of belittling Serb war crimes. Draskovic laid out his vision for Kosovo ("more than autonomy, less than independence") and argued for a model similar to that offered to (but rejected by) Bosnian Serbs in the 1990s.

14. Draskovic's predecessor as foreign minister, Goran Svilanovic, spoke of negative EU perceptions of Serbia, and of the Balkans generally. He urged continued active U.S. engagement as a prerequisite for progress in the region. Kosovo politician and publicist Veton Surroi noted that the report by UN Kosovo Special Envoy Kai Eide would reflect growing frustration among Kosovars about delays in resolving the final status question. Surroi would prefer to see the U.S. "impose unilateral status conditions," rather than accept a solution proposed by the EU-25. Montenegro's Minister for European Integration, Gordana Djurovic, argued in favor of independence for her country, saying the referendum in spring 2006 will drive a peaceful and ultimately successful movement that will be a model for the peaceful dissolution of unions like Serbia and Montenegro.

EU-Russia

15. Experts at a EU-Russia panel provided a sober analysis of the state of EU-Russia relations. They noted considerable frustration at all levels of the EU about the authoritarian course of the Putin regime in its second term. The strains between Moscow and Brussels were reflected in the EU's "Neighborhood Policy," in which the EU was seeking to create a "wider Europe" including, inter alia, Ukraine and Georgia. This conflicted, however with Russia's conception of its "near abroad." Former Deputy ForMin of Russia Anatoly Adamishin thought EU expectations for Russia were too high, not allowing Russia enough time to undergo its transformation process. He also criticized the EU for using a "double standard" in its dealings with Russia, as opposed to China.

EU and the U.S.

16. Anti-U.S. or anti-Administration rhetoric was notably absent from the discussions. Former U.S. ambassador to the OSCE Stephen Minikes stated that while the U.S. and the EU were "not in the same house," both faced "the same fundamental challenges." Minikes argued that criticism of the U.S. in Europe was frequently a result of a lack of understanding of American values. Despite the recent U.S.-EU friction over Iraq, he recalled that both sides had accomplished a lot together in the past -- and noted they had no alternative but to stay engaged with one another.

17. In a debate entitled "Is there a global partnership?" Michael Haltzel, former Democratic staff director for European affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, argued that despite European perceptions of American unilateralism, Washington remained engaged in a wide web of international partnerships, ranging from the WTO to ad-hoc partnerships with the EU for humanitarian interventions to prevent genocide. Most important now was cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism, Haltzel argued. Czech EU parliamentarian Jana Hybaskova seconded Haltzel's comments, stating that the EU and the U.S. faced such enormous common challenges that there was absolutely no time for petty transatlantic bickering.

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